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THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND

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At present neither the prospect of home rule nor the danger from Germany nor the mighty design of imperial federation assails the public mind of England so insistently as the demand for the enfranchisement of women. Since 1905 it has come to be realized that British men and women are face to face with a change of profound importance, and that the veil of the future hides immense possibilities of good or of ill soon to come.

Allowing British women to take part in the government of the realm is a question of the last century and particularly of the years since 1867, but the antiquarian traces the elements of the problem in the feudal law of the earlier middle ages, when tenure and service rather than persons furnished the basis of organization, and when instances occur of women taking part in local affairs and holding office and jurisdiction. For the most part, however, these instances are valuable now merely as the slender basis for legal argument.

In the seventeenth century some women attempted to influence the conduct of parliamentary affairs.¹ In 1642 a throng of gentlewomen and tradesmen's wives came to the house of commons with a petition against papists and prelates. "Christ hath purchased us at as dear a rate as he hath done men," they said. "You shall, God willing, receive from us all the satisfaction which we can possibly give," replied Pym, who was sent to the door to address them.² Next year a great crowd came and cried out against "that dog Pym," and threw brickbats until the horsemen charged them with drawn swords.³ Several times Lon-

¹ Cf. *Commons' Journals*, i, 348.

² *Parliamentary History*, ii, 1072-1076; *Commons' Journals*, ii, 413.

³ Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, v, 357, 358.

don women assembled with petitions. Once they halted Sir Simond D'Ewes, and even the mighty Oliver, it is said.⁴ These actions, slight beside what was done by the women of Paris in the days of terror, led to nothing, and there is only the shadow of them now in the ridicule of Hudibras and the yellowed tomes of Rushworth.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, in the days of revolutionists and liberal thinkers, woman's interest in government began to be formally urged. In 1792 Mary Godwin wrote her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. "I may excite laughter," she said, "for I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed."⁵ In 1797 Fox, speaking in the house of commons against a too wide extension of the suffrage, declared that the superior class of women were far better qualified to vote than the lower class of men.⁶ In 1847 appeared the first women's suffrage hand-bill, asserting that good government was impossible unless both sexes were represented.⁷ A year later Disraeli, speaking in parliament, declared that in a country governed by a woman and where women had possessed so many privileges of property and jurisdiction, "I do not see . . . on what reasons, if you come to right, she has not a right to vote."⁸ In 1857 the work of a Quakeress, Anne Kent, led to the formation of the Sheffield Female Political Association, the first suffragist organization. A few years after, John Stuart Mill became the apostle of the cause, after which it attracted ever increasing attention. By 1878 a critic who was no friend to the movement wrote that it had reached a point from which "it cannot recede, and from which it is almost as impossible that it should not advance."⁹

Therefore it may be seen that the women's suffrage agitation, so prominent of late, is nothing new. Indeed, the student is apt

⁴ Cf. Ellen A. M'Arthur, "Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament," *English Historical Review*, xxiv, 698-709.

⁵ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 335.

⁶ *Parliamentary History*, xxxiii, 726, 727.

⁷ Cf. Kaethe Schirmacher, *The Modern Woman's Rights Movement* (New York, 1912), p. 60.

⁸ *3 Parliamentary Debates* (abbreviated below *P. D.*), xcix, 950.

⁹ Mrs. A. S. Orr, *Nineteenth Century*, iii, 1010.

to be astonished at the gradual progress made recently. Fifty years ago a few men and more women were saying that which many people are saying nowadays. Viewed as a whole the movement seems only one part of the rise of humanity and the extension of democracy in the nineteenth century. Women have been rising as men have been rising; and they have advanced less rapidly because bound more straightly by the past. But they have realized their disabilities, and with this understanding has come the desire to be free and better. The most important factors in this development have been the achieving of a partial economic enfranchisement and the gaining of intellectual freedom through education.

Suffrage enthusiasts are not justified in their extreme accounts of the legal disabilities of women in olden times; for historically it seems certain that many of the inequalities were designed to protect women more than to depress them. It is certain, however, that by Glanvil's time most English women had before the law a position subordinate and inferior. By the end of the eighteenth century there had been some amelioration, but the inequality was still very striking. Generally speaking, women could not hold office and could take no part in the elections. They were debarred from jury service, and in some instances oppressed with harder punishments. Otherwise women who were unmarried had the same legal status as men, except in the inheritance of entailed estates. Married women, however, the great part of the female population, were on a distinctly different footing. By marriage the husband and the wife were one person in law, and the existence of the woman was merged absolutely in that of her partner, under whose cover "she performs everything; and is therefore called in our law french a *feme covert*."¹⁰ The woman was *feme*, the husband *baron* or lord, to whom she owed obedience, and for whose murder she would be guilty of treason. Since the husband was accountable for the conduct of his wife, he might restrain and chastise her; and although she had come to have reasonable security, Blackstone confesses that "the lower rank of people, who were always fond of the old common law, still claim

¹⁰ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, bk. i, ch. 15.

and exert their ancient privilege.”¹¹ On marriage the woman’s personal property became the husband’s, as did the revenue of her estates. Since she had no legal existence, she could make no contract. The children belonged to the father. Divorce was difficult. For slander there was no redress. “So great a favourite is the female sex of the laws of England.”¹²

The burden of law and custom, once borne in silence, was endured unwillingly, when the circumstances of a changing age brought greater freedom. Of all the changes which contributed to the uplifting of women, education, and particularly higher education, was the most important. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was scant opportunity for girls to carry on studies beyond the elementary stage, and generally education was poor and difficult to obtain. For 1843 the marriage registers show that nearly half of the women were unable to write, while this was true of less than a third of the men.¹³ As time went on education was made better and more widely diffused, but even more important was the work done about the middle of the century in giving to women advanced instruction and college training. Gradually they were admitted to colleges and universities, and then obtained part of the empire of knowledge, so long in the possession of men. The deeper insight and the broader view thus gained make this movement as important to the womanhood of England as the Renaissance was to the companions of Petrarch and Erasmus.

This freeing of the intellect was accompanied by growing economic importance and some economic freedom. The story of the breaking up of the old home industries and the concentration of manufacturers in the factories of capitalists has often been told, and also the hideous wrongs which beset the women and children gathered there; but it was by the industrial revolution that economic independence was obtained. The women who had previously worked in the homes of their fathers or husbands, now worked beyond their supervision for wages, and as time went by came to regard these wages as their own and to keep them.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Statesman's Year Book*, 1911, p. 31.

And finally, to these causes there was added another which if ultimately less powerful was directly the most effective of them all, and that was the greater number of women. At the beginning of the century there were in England and Wales nearly 400,000 more women than men. For a long while the sons of the nation had been going out into new homes, and all too frequently their women had not gone with them. Continually the surplus of women increased. Nothing explains the intensity of the forces which now appear so clearly as the figures of the census.¹⁴ In 1913 the women exceeded the men by 1,200,000, so that there is a large number who cannot possibly marry. Herein not a few students have seen the cause of the suffrage movement,¹⁵ while antagonists have believed that the remedy lies in correcting an abnormal situation. The suffragists, they say, are the incomplete and sexually embittered;¹⁶ the mateless woman of England should join their men in the newer lands beyond the sea.

Such are the conditions of the problem. The position of women in England was not that of men, and the inequalities were endured less willingly as women obtained knowledge and financial independence. Many were indifferent or conservative; but the bolder or more impatient were constantly urged on by an increasing

¹⁴ CENSUS	POPULATION	MEN	WOMEN	EXCESS OF WOMEN
1801	8,892,536	4,254,735	4,637,801	383,066
1811	10,164,256	4,873,605	5,290,651	417,046
1821	12,000,236	5,850,319	6,149,917	299,598
1831	13,896,797	6,771,196	7,125,601	354,405
1841	15,914,148	7,777,586	8,136,562	358,976
1851	17,927,609	8,781,225	9,146,384	365,159
1861	20,066,224	9,776,259	10,289,965	513,706
1871	22,712,266	11,058,934	11,653,332	594,398
1881	25,968,286	12,624,754	13,343,532	718,778
1891	29,001,018	14,050,620	14,950,398	899,768
1901	32,526,075	15,721,728	16,804,347	1,082,619
1911	36,075,269	17,448,476	18,626,793	1,178,317

Statesman's Year Book, 1882, p. 240; 1892, p. 14; 1902, p. 14; 1912, p. 12.

¹⁵ Cf. *Nineteenth Century*, iii, 1013.

¹⁶ Letter of Sir Almroth Wright, *London Times* (weekly), March 29, 1912.

army of unmarried women forced out of the home to carry on an unequal contest with men.¹⁷ These women believed that great changes were necessary for their welfare, and that these changes could only be obtained with the ballot.

The movement for enfranchisement became a real force in England in the days of John Stuart Mill. Before his time earnest people had spoken and labored for it, enthusiasts had gained notoriety, literature had been circulated, and some societies had been founded; but it was a novelty which encountered ridicule more than respect until Mill became its champion. In 1865 he was sent to the house of commons for Westminster. In writings and speeches he had already declared himself heartily in favor of women's suffrage; now he brought the matter before parliament.

In 1866 the second struggle to extend the parliamentary franchise reached its culmination with the introduction of the "representation of the people's bill." On May 20 of the year following Mill proposed to amend the fourth clause by substituting "person" for "man," so that women might not be excluded. Women, he said were neither unfit nor dangerous. The place of woman was the home, but suffrage would not interfere with her work. The exclusion of women because of sex was in violation of the old established English doctrine that taxation and representation should go together. Women were interested in the larger concerns of life as were men, to whom they were companions, and from whom they could not be thrust apart. "The time is now come," he declared, "when, unless women are raised to the level of men, men will be pulled down to theirs."¹⁸ The amendment was rejected, but after events were to show that this was the beginning not the end of the struggle.¹⁹

The reform act of 1867 provided that every qualified "man" might vote,²⁰ thus changing the provision of the act of 1832 which had given the franchise to male persons.²¹ Suffragists assert that

¹⁷ Cf. 3 *P. D.*, cclxxxviii, 1946, 1947.

¹⁸ 3 *P. D.*, clxxxii, 1253; clxxxvii, 817-829.

¹⁹ 3 *P. D.*, clxxxvii, 843.

²⁰ 30 and 31 Victoria, c. 102, sec. 3.

²¹ 2 and 3 William IV, c. 45, sec. 19.

according to the old law and custom of England women were permitted to vote, that abbesses were summoned to parliament,²² that women took part in local elections,²³ that the election law of 1429 did not restrict the suffrage to men,²⁴ and that the term "man" whenever used in old legal documents denotes women as well as men.²⁵ In 1850 it had been enacted that "in all Acts Words importing the Masculine Gender shall be deemed and taken to include Females."²⁶ Accordingly the courts were now asked to determine whether under the provisions of the new law women were not entitled to vote; but in 1868 they decided that the privilege was not so granted.²⁷ In 1884 the third Reform Act, which widened the electorate still further, continued the exclusion of women by allowing the suffrage to "every man" therein described.²⁸

Failing to obtain their desire through legal construction, the suffragists sought enfranchisement through a statute of the realm. Mill was not returned to the house of commons, but the cause was taken up by his associates and by new advocates who appeared. In 1870 Jacob Bright brought forward the women's disabilities bill, the first women's suffrage measure presented in England. It was thoroughly debated, but was lost after the second reading.²⁹ Thereafter numerous bills were introduced, frequently several in the same year, and debates became longer and more and more frequent.³⁰ Most of the measures proposed were never considered at all, but on seven occasions suffragist bills passed the second reading.³¹ Meanwhile in 1884 strenuous efforts were made for an amendment to the pending reform bill so that women might be included. In the same year the aged Lord Denman presented

²² Cf. Palgrave, *Parliamentary Writs*, i, 164.

²³ Cf. *Commons' Journals*, i, 875.

²⁴ Cf. *Statutes of the Realm*, ii, 243.

²⁵ Cf. C. C. Stopes, *British Freewomen, Their Historical Privilege*.

²⁶ 13 Victoria, c. 21, sec. 4.

²⁷ Court of Common Pleas. *Chorlton v. Lings*.

²⁸ 48 Victoria, c. 3, sec. 2.

²⁹ 3 P. D., cci, 194, 239, 607.

³⁰ Cf. Mrs. M. G. Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage*, 84.

³¹ In 1870, 1886, 1897, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911. Cf. *A Brief Review of the Women's Suffrage Movement Since Its Beginning in 1832* (London, 1911).

in the house of lords a bill "for extending the right of voting at parliamentary elections to women."³² Every year thereafter for the next decade he brought up the matter, but could never gain a hearing, because of the objection usually urged that the lords should not first consider a measure affecting the house of commons.³³

The history of these efforts during forty-five years presents the curious problem of no progress being made in parliament, despite the fact that the matter was kept before the commons year by year, with repeated and lengthy discussion, with many bills introduced, and with some of them having heavy majorities on second reading. Apparently there was during most of this time a majority in favor of such a measure, and this the suffragists confidently maintain.³⁴ In 1911 Sir George Kemp declared that a stranger inquiring about women's suffrage would be told that "for the last quarter of a century it had a permanent majority in this House."³⁵ Whether this majority contained for the most part men who would work to the end for the consummation of their purpose, or whether it was composed of supporters who were advocates up to a certain point and lukewarm thereafter, it is difficult to decide. There is, however, no doubt that this majority existed only in so far as it was assembled around the principle of women's suffrage, and had otherwise no cohesion or strength. It was admitted from the first that the question was not political in the ordinary sense.³⁶ Both parties were divided on the question, so that the advocates of enfranchisement came from each of them without the support of either. Politically, then, the chief cause of the failure of the movement is that neither of the great parties in the house of commons has made women's suffrage a government measure, and that therefore the cause has lacked the powerful force of party organization and political

³² 3 P. D., cclxxxix, 1860.

³³ 3 P. D., cccx, 256, 257, 258.

³⁴ "There has been a majority in the House of Commons in favour of women's suffrage since 1886." Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage*, 85. Cf. 4 P. D., cxlvi, 218.

³⁵ 5 P. D., xxv, 744.

³⁶ 4 P. D., xlv, 1174. Cf. *ibid.*, cxxxi, 1335; cxlvi, 218.

machinery. It would seem, moreover, as sympathizers have declared, that obstacles have been cunningly placed in the way.³⁷ In 1911 Mr F. E. Smith, in a debate on the parliament bill, asserted that if the prime minister would give facilities for full parliamentary discussion, women's suffrage would be carried into a law within two years.³⁸

The women's suffrage bills introduced into parliament bore various titles. Some were bills for the removal of the disabilities of women, some for the enfranchisement of women, and some for the extension of the parliamentary franchise.³⁹ The purpose of all of them was to allow women to vote in elections for members of the house of commons, and the avowed object was to remove disabilities resulting merely from sex.⁴⁰ Upon what women the privilege was to be conferred was not always clear. The earlier bills proposed to enfranchise widows and spinsters with qualifications prescribed.⁴¹ Such a measure would not have enlarged the electorate to a very great extent. In 1876 it was estimated that by the terms of Mr. Forsyth's bill parliamentary elections would be made by thirteen women for every hundred men,⁴² and shortly after it was said that not more than 400,000 names would be added to the lists.⁴³ Even the legislators of 1910 proposed to enfranchise no more than 1,000,000 women, or, roughly, one woman to every seven men.⁴⁴ The more ardent leaders, however, were at no time willing that women should be excluded because they were represented by husbands, and it was often suspected that any legislation carried would permit wives to vote, leading perhaps to adult suffrage, and that such was the design of the advocates, if not directly, at least as an ultimate consequence.⁴⁵

³⁷ 3 *P. D.*, cccii, 700.

³⁸ 5 *P. D.*, xxv, 1660.

³⁹ Cf. 3 *P. D.*, ccix, 90; cccii, 187; 4 *P. D.*, xiii, 404.

⁴⁰ 3 *P. D.*, cclxxxi, 664; 5 *P. D.*, xxv, 738.

⁴¹ Cf. 3 *P. D.*, ccxxviii, 1659.

⁴² 3 *P. D.*, ccxxviii, 1667.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, cexl, 1827.

⁴⁴ 5 *P. D.*, xxv, 739-741.

⁴⁵ 3 *P. D.*, ccxxviii, 1669; ccxxxiv, 1364; cclxxxi, 718.

As there were more women in the country than men, this was constantly urged as a capital objection.⁴⁶

Many of the arguments about women's suffrage have been repeated so often that what seems striking in 1867 is familiar by 1884 and in 1913 interesting only through intrinsic merit. Therefore the arguments advanced on one side or the other during the past fifty years may be properly summed up and treated in one place together.

Suffragists declare that women suffer under disabilities that only the ballot can remedy. Much has been done to remove the injustice of unequal laws, married women have been given control of their property, a wife is no longer *feme covert*, and the husband is no longer her lord; but the divorce laws are unequal, the father is the sole parent of the children, the husband is the sole owner of his income, the age of consent is too low, and new social and industrial laws may bring new discrimination.⁴⁷ They say, also, that industrial salvation can only be obtained in the way that men have obtained it, by making their influence felt in the government.⁴⁸ Until they can make legislators fear them, legislators will never heed them. Men's trade unions were not legalized until the ballots of laborers were feared,⁴⁹ and since 1832 the wages of men have risen greatly while the wages of women have lagged far behind.⁵⁰ The government, they say, deliberately pays its women employees at a lower rate than its men, while the more profitable positions are withheld from women altogether.⁵¹ In

⁴⁶ "Woman suffrage means adult suffrage; and adult suffrage means the transfer of the right to govern the United Kingdom from some 7,000,000 of men to some 20,000,000 or, it may be, 24,000,000 of men and women, whereof women will be the majority." A. V. Dicey, *Quarterly Review*, ccx, 299 (January, 1909).

⁴⁷ Cf. Frederick W. Pethick Lawrence, *Women's Fight For The Vote* (London, 1911), 28-36; 4 P. D., cxxxi, 1358.

⁴⁸ *Some Reasons Why Working Women Want the Vote* (leaflet).

⁴⁹ Geraldine Hodgson, *Five Points in the Relation between Votes for Women and Certain Economic and Social Facts* (leaflet).

⁵⁰ 3 P. D., cxli, 1810; 4 P. D., cxxxi, 1334, 1345; "*Easier to Starve*" (leaflet). In 1905 it was asserted that the average weekly wage of British working women was seven shillings. 4 P. D., cxlvi, 223.

⁵¹ Pethick Lawrence, *Women's Fight For The Vote*, 37-44.

an age when a vast number of English women are compelled to support themselves such a situation is intolerable.⁵²

They assert also that it is unjust for them not to be represented in the government, and most fitting and necessary that they should have a part in it. Again and again have they denounced taxes without representation, and the fact that they must obey man-made laws but have no voice in making them.⁵³ "You admit women to the gallows and the gaol, to the Income Tax list and the poor rate book. By what right do you debar them from the ballot box?"⁵⁴

Aside from the justice of giving votes to women, such enfranchisement would be for the good not merely of women but of men and of the state as well. Some things affect women particularly, and there are some which men can never understand as they do.⁵⁵ Such are questions relating to morality, education, the care of children, and all social and economic matters affecting municipalities, which may be regarded as the surroundings of the home.⁵⁶ Men can do some kinds of work better than women, who are in other respects superior. At present the state loses the intelligence and energy which women, when they are allowed to vote, will bring to bear in government for the betterment of all men, women and children.⁵⁷

Whenever in the past there have been proposals to increase the electorate, the novelty of the thing has aroused distrust in the conservative part of the nation. This was so in 1832, 1867, and 1884, and opposition preceded all attempts to remove disabilities from Catholics, Jews, Dissenters, and Irish. But in no instance have the disasters followed which were predicted. In the case of women such fears are evidently groundless, for women are now asking for the parliamentary franchise after they have been admitted to vote in local elections. Gradually single women and

⁵² 3 *P. D.*, ccxl, 1840.

⁵³ *What Is A Vote?* (leaflet).

⁵⁴ 3 *P. D.*, cclxxxix, 162. Cf. *Punch*, May 10, 1905.

⁵⁵ *A Wider World* (leaflet).

⁵⁶ *Let the Women Help* (leaflet); *White Slave Traffic* (leaflet).

⁵⁷ *Men & Women Together* (leaflet); *The Question of the Moment* (leaflet).

widows have been made eligible as electors and even candidates in one local unit after another, until at last they may vote in elections for parish, district, town, and county councils, for poor law guardians and for school boards.⁵⁸ If women can be trusted to do work of this kind, and it is admitted that they are doing it well, there can be no doubt that they are qualified in experience, ability and intellect to take part in the conduct of national affairs. The recent experience of the younger British commonwealths and of some of the states of North America proves, they say, the truth of this contention.⁵⁹

And finally, the effect upon women would be desirable from every point of view. The traditional woman's life of circumscribed activity, narrow interests, dependence and servility, make her unfitted to do her best work in the modern world. Participation in politics and interest in larger things would make her finer and happier, a more admirable human being, a mother more worthy of the respect of sons and daughters, a truer wife, a more sympathetic companion to her husband. Then she would receive more honor and respect because she deserved it. The world would award her more because she would be better and could do more for the world.

Against all this it is urged that the proper work of men and of women is distinctly divided by nature.⁶⁰ The place of woman is primarily in the home as a wife and mother, and the tasks outside are for the most part man's. Any undue enlargement of the duties of either sex is detrimental to the interests of the other. If women engage actively in politics, they will probably be less willing to marry, and so the state will suffer grievously while the neglect of home duties by the mothers will bring enduring harm to children. Nor, if women exhaust their nervous strength in assuming new and needless duties, will they be fitted as before to enter into marriage and motherhood.⁶¹ All this is realized by

⁵⁸ Cf. 4 P. D., xlv, 1175; *The Anti-Suffrage Handbook* (London, 1912), 67-69. For the most part married women are debarred from these rights.

⁵⁹ 4 P. D., cxxxi, 1333; but cf. *The Anti-Suffrage Handbook*, 59.

⁶⁰ *Manifesto. No Votes For Women* (leaflet).

⁶¹ Cf. *Nineteenth Century*, lxxii, 179, 180 (July, 1912).

most women, who do not desire to have the suffrage thrust upon them.⁶²

The very temperament of women and the relations of the sexes make voting by women undesirable. It is the nature of women to be hasty, emotional, subject to influence, and at times not capable of just decision. The success of English institutions and the growth of England's power are due to the resolute steadiness of Englishmen, which would be lost if feminine whim and impulse entered into government.⁶³ As women are more subject to religious domination than men, the government might, when they voted, get into the hands of prelates and priests.⁶⁴ Nor would there be the old harmony in family life or the sweet dependence of woman upon man. Then husband would be divided from wife, and they might conceivably be opposing candidates at elections.⁶⁵

The national affairs of Great Britain are men's affairs, and must be so. The empire has been built up with the efforts and the lives of great men, and only their sons can rule it. Things that affect the existence of the nation cannot be left to the inexperience, the sentiment, and the wavering decision of women, nor would the subject races of the east ever endure such rule.⁶⁶ Moreover, the admission of women to the parliamentary franchise would mean the ultimate domination of women over men in England. When women vote they will never be content until they hold office.⁶⁷ Then, since there is a majority of women, females will rule, and then will men suffer petticoat domination in the government which once they created.⁶⁸

A government based partly upon the votes of women would fail because the decrees of such a government could never be

⁶² 4 P. D., cxlvi, 235.

⁶³ 3 P. D., cclxxxix, 103; 4 P. D., cxlvi, 227.

⁶⁴ 3 P. D., cxli, 1805; cxxviii, 1700.

⁶⁵ 4 P. D., cxxxi, 1342.

⁶⁶ *Woman Suffrage And India* (leaflet); A. C. Gronno, *The Woman M. P., A Peril to Women and the Country*, 35.

⁶⁷ 3 P. D., ccii, 697.

⁶⁸ "*Votes For Women, Never!*" (leaflet); 3 P. D., cclxxxix, 173. In 1904 Mr. Labouchere said: "If the Resolution was adopted, therefore, the country would be absolutely in the hands of women." 4 P. D., cxxxi, 1339.

enforced against the wishes of a majority of the men. Government, say the upholders of this view, rests ultimately upon force, and in the last resort upon nothing else. The acquiescence of the minority in the will of the majority is based upon experience gained through ages of fighting, that the majority can enforce its will; and at present it is well understood that the greater number of votes represents what was once the greater number of fighting men, and what would be again, if there were need of it. But with women in the electorate this could not usually be certain. If there came a day when a majority was made up of the greater number of women and the smaller number of men, while the minority embraced most of the men and the lesser of women, then in all probability the minority would overturn the government and enforce its desire, because it could do so.⁶⁹ Therefore, while women should have full civil equality and, if need be, local political rights, they ought not to have part in the government of the realm, since they cannot bear arms against its enemies nor enforce its decrees at home.⁷⁰

Women do not need the vote, nor it is well for them to have it. Women are not held in servitude by the tyranny of men. The old legal inequalities, which arose in the midst of different conditions, have been removed one after another, until now, in some instances, the woman is favored at the expense of the man.⁷¹ Throughout the nineteenth century parliaments of men passed laws to assist and protect women workers. Inferiority of women's wages is not the result of laws, but is owing to the inferiority of women's work and to far-reaching economic causes which suffrage alone never can remove.⁷² Not only would enfranchisement not cure the ills of which suffragists complain, but women, seeking

⁶⁹ Dicey, *Quarterly Review*, cex, 293, 294; 4 *P. D.*, cxlvi, 233.

⁷⁰ A. MacCallum Scott, *The Physical Force Argument Against Woman Suffrage*, London, 1912; but cf. 4 *P. D.*, cxxxi. 1346: "they had borne in their own arms those who became able to defend it."

⁷¹ *The Anti-Suffrage Handbook*, 48-51.

⁷² A. M. Scott, *Equal Pay For Equal Work, A Woman Suffrage Fallacy*, London, 1912; cf. 4 *P. D.*, cxlvi, 231.

vain remedies in the world of politics, would become less womanly and undergo inevitable deterioration of character.⁷³

Such are the arguments which are scattered through the parliamentary debates for fifty years, which reappear in the newspapers continually, which are to be heard of evenings in assembly halls and on Sundays in Hyde Park, and which issue forth in a ceaseless stream of pamphlets and flying leaves. In such a controversy the historian is at a loss to decide. Contentions once revolutionary now appear reasonable, while some of the opposition is that prejudice and unreason which ever clog the steps of progress. Nevertheless, it is no easy task to declare to which scale the finger of destiny points, or in which finally will be found most of right and of justice.

The debates in parliament and the arguments in meeting and press represent only a part of the work done by organizations of women which have multiplied exceedingly and grown to huge proportions. In 1867 women's suffrage societies were founded in London, Edinburgh, and Manchester, and shortly after in Birmingham and Bristol.⁷⁴ These bodies soon united to form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the oldest, the largest, and the most useful organization of its kind in the world. It is supported by 40,000 members, has more than 400 branches and affiliated societies,⁷⁵ and publishes a paper entitled *The Common Cause*. Its purpose is "To promote the claim of Women to the Parliamentary Vote on the same terms as it is or may be granted to men,"⁷⁶ and its work has been done so ably and withal so quietly that many believe such women to be worthy of that which they request. In 1903 was founded the Women's Social and Political Union, presently to be described.⁷⁷ Its

⁷³ It may be remarked that a great many men and women, who are averse to the granting of parliamentary suffrage to women, are thoroughly in favor of having them engage in local politics, saying that here they are well fitted to take part, here their true interests lie, and here they could be of real service to themselves and to the state.

⁷⁴ Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage*, 85.

⁷⁵ *National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*, report, 1913.

⁷⁶ *Constitution of the National Union*, etc.

⁷⁷ Pethick Lawrence, *Women's Fight For The Vote*, 77.

organ is *The Suffragette*.⁷⁸ In 1907 arose the Women's Freedom League, and also the Men's League for Women's Suffrage. Organized opposition came later; in 1908 appeared the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, and the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. Two years later they combined to form the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage, a body which contains some of the most prominent people in England. Its publication is the *Anti-Suffrage Review*. These societies have well-equipped headquarters, distribute vast quantities of campaign literature, hold meetings, organize processions, circulate petitions, attempt to influence elections, and carry on a vigorous propaganda.⁷⁹

For the most part this is the situation, and down to 1905 this was the situation, in England. The work was done earnestly but in quiet. Some women refused to pay taxes without parliamentary representation, but there was little of the boisterous and sensational. A great deal of solid progress was being made, and the country seemed preparing for mighty transformation in the future; but public attention was not distracted and the opponents of women's suffrage were not alarmed.⁸⁰ Suddenly the entire situation was altered by the rise of militancy, one of the most baffling problems in contemporary politics.

In 1892 some of the suffrage advocates had been stigmatized as "wild women,"⁸¹ but the new methods can scarcely be said to have been employed until 1905 when Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters raised the Women's Social and Political Union into sudden prominence. The members of this organization, believing that constitutional methods had too long been of no avail, that the house of commons never granted what it was not compelled to give, flung back the taunts that women would not fight for their cause, and began to apply methods of force, annoyance

⁷⁸ Until 1912 its organ was *Votes for Women*, now published by Mr. and Mrs. Pethick Lawrence, who seceded from the Union in that year.

⁷⁹ *The Historic Anti-Suffragist Demonstration*, etc., London, 1912; Mrs. Fawcett, *The Best Friends of Women's Suffrage* (leaflet).

⁸⁰ Some of the opponents believed that the whole matter was an academic question. Cf. *The Anti-Suffrage Handbook*, 12.

⁸¹ *Nineteenth Century*, xxxi, 455.

and coercion. In October of that year Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst at a meeting in Manchester insisted that Sir Edward Grey declare the intentions of the Liberal party in the matter of women's enfranchisement. In the midst of noise and disorder they were ejected from the hall.⁸² In April 1906 during a suffrage debate in the commons, proceedings were interrupted by cries and cheers from the ladies' gallery. After a while the speakers were silenced under shouts of "We will not have this talk any longer," "Divide, divide," "Vote, vote, vote," "Vote for Justice for women," "We refuse to have our Bill talked out." Nor was there order until the gallery had been cleared.⁸³

And now appeared tactics as startling and novel as they were effective. Everywhere political meetings were invaded by women who bound themselves to pillars or chained themselves to seats and then interrupted and shouted and screamed. Government officials high and low were sought out and pestered by determined women whom only the police could turn away. They invaded the lobbies of parliament and the homes of ministers, and nowhere were men safe from their questions or their missiles. In a short time the government was undergoing a mild siege, and the "suffragettes," as the militant women were called, had made good their boast: they had brought their cause into prominence at last.

When the Liberal party came into power in 1906 many of the suffragists hoped that at last their desires would be fulfilled. It had long been evident, in the development of British parliamentary procedure that bills introduced by private members had no chance of success unless the government gave facilities and assistance. This support had long been denied, but it was believed that the Liberals would now give it. Moreover in May 1908, Mr. Asquith announced that the government proposed to introduce a bill for further electoral reform, and that if an amendment for the enfranchisement of women were added, he would not hinder it. He himself was strongly opposed to women's suffrage, but the larger part of his cabinet seemed to favor it. Prospects of success appeared brighter now than ever before, but the country became

⁸² Pethick Lawrence, *Women's Fight For The Vote*, 77-83.

⁸³ 4 P. D., clv, 1570-1587.

absorbed in the desperate struggle between lords and commons with swiftly succeeding general elections, so that for a while nothing could be done.

In 1910 a "conciliation committee" was formed in the house of commons to enable the suffragist advocates in both parties to work effectively and prepare a measure which would be acceptable to all of them. A bill was drafted to enfranchise women householders or occupiers. It was displeasing to those who had been working for the simple removal of sex disqualification, but was received with considerable satisfaction, since it would give the franchise to about 1,000,000 women. This bill passed second reading by a majority of 109, but got no farther, Mr. Asquith refusing the facilities necessary.⁸⁴ Meanwhile the suffrage societies and their supporters marched in great processions, a vast number of petitions for the conciliation bill came in, and a gathering in Hyde Park was attended by half a million people. Again parliament was dissolved, and the suffragists as before did all that they could to bring enfranchisement before the country as an issue. In November Mr. Asquith promised explicitly that if his party dominated the next parliament he would give facilities for a women's suffrage bill drawn to admit of free amendment.⁸⁵ The supporters of the cause now felt that they had two chances of success, the amendment of the proposed reform bill, and the passage of a bill of their own.

In 1911 the conciliation committee introduced a bill differing slightly from what they had proposed the year before, and designed to meet the objections then raised. Substantially, the vote would be given to the women householders. For this bill on second reading there was a majority of 167.⁸⁶ What would have befallen this measure in the next session one may not say. The old methods of burking might have been tried again successfully, but there now seemed to be a favorable majority in the cabinet and also in the commons, while there was friendly sentiment for it all over the country. At this juncture, however, the militant

⁸⁴ 5 *P. D.*, xix, 41, 324, 2587.

⁸⁵ 5 *P. D.*, xx, 272, 273.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, xxv, 738, 806.

women who had been at truce with the government, burst forth in fury. In November, 1911, the prime minister announced that he was about to introduce a manhood suffrage bill. Although he reiterated his promise of facilities for the conciliation bill, and again undertook, a few days later, to allow a women's suffrage amendment to be brought to government's measure, the suffragettes, who desired that the government include women in the reform bill, felt that they had been betrayed.⁸⁷ "It was as if Mr. Asquith had spat in my face and that of my whole sex," one of them declared.⁸⁸ At once the wild women broke loose. In November, 1911, and again in March, 1912, they descended upon Oxford Street, Piccadilly, Cockspur Street, and the West End, and smashed a prodigious number of windows with hammers and with stones.⁸⁹ Attempts were made to set fire to theatres and public buildings, and by the spring of 1913 it had become necessary to maintain constant guard over all the historic buildings of England. Meanwhile letter-boxes were filled with inflammable liquid, wires were cut, bombs were placed in doorways, and places of amusement were burned down. In the years from 1911 to 1913 there was a veritable rebellion of the suffragettes against the government of England.

Whatever may be said of the wisdom of the militants or even of their motives, there is no question that they acted with the greatest hardihood and boldness, reviving for modern days the grandest traditions of the warrior women of the past. They stopped at nothing to accomplish their purpose, and refused all compromise. In many cases there can be no doubt that their motives were lofty and pure, and that they were willing to endure martyrdom for their sex and for the welfare of the world. Even in prison they defied their enemies, and baffled their jailers with the hunger strike, one of the most effective weapons which rebels have ever employed. And finally, some of them endured the horrors of forcible feeding, a torture not much exceeded by the worst done in Mexico or Russia. Nevertheless, it has followed

⁸⁷ *Times* (w), Nov. 10, 1911.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1911.

⁸⁹ *Times* (w), Nov. 24, 1911, March 8, 1912.

as an inevitable consequence that these women have for the present worked harm to their cause. Much done by them has been ugly, and has seemed sneaking and mean. Breaking the windows of unoffending tradesmen, burning pavilions, destroying letters, and poisoning dogs, give small dignity to the best cause. Nor is the world prepared as yet to see women use violence. In vain the suffragettes declare that in fighting by such means as they can, they but follow in the footsteps of the heroes and martyrs of old, who sacrificed themselves for the good of posterity. It has been pointed out that when in the past men have resorted to violence, they have thus signified their readiness to begin an armed revolution, something that women can never do with any hope of success. Therefore since 1905 there has been a gradual revulsion of feeling, which by 1913 is intense. Many who were once amused or indifferent are now hostile, and the suffragists themselves confess that the suffragettes have done immense harm,⁹⁰ and have postponed indefinitely the grant of the parliamentary franchise to women.

Whatever be the cause, such is the result. In March, 1912, the conciliation bill was defeated, and this was attributed to the smashing of the windows.⁹¹ The constitutional suffragists now as a last recourse strove valiantly to rescue the passage of a women's suffrage amendment to the government's measure, but in January, 1913, the speaker ruled that a bill so amended would be a new bill, and would have to be withdrawn and re-introduced. So after all the years of striving and endeavor, the suffragists found themselves left with nothing more than the old expedient, so often discredited, of the private member's bill. And as each new failure is recorded, and the conduct of the militants becomes increasingly violent, the government at last seems to be gaining that measure of popular support without which it has been willing to proceed to extremities. In 1912 the suffragette orators in Hyde Park could no longer obtain a favorable hearing, and for a while in 1913 they needed police protection wherever they appeared. The authorities have not yet been willing to allow a woman to die of the hunger

⁹⁰ *Broken Windows—And After* (leaflet).

⁹¹ 5 *P. D.*, xxxvi, 728; xl, 643; *Times* (w), March 29, 1912.

strike, but they now release the strikers only in the last extremity and, under the "cat and mouse act," only during good behavior.

Such is the situation as it seems at present. After a long period of intelligent activity the suffragists have made tremendous progress, but at present the cause is in disrepute because of the militant women.⁹² The ultimate value of the militant activity cannot yet be estimated. It may be that at the cost of temporary obloquy these women are gaining the attention and compelling the respect which their cause did not have before; and it must be remembered that in the history of American slavery the mild abolitionists accomplished little until Garrison and the anti-slavery agitators began their work. On the other hand it must be said that these ardent champions of the woman's cause have deliberately invoked violence and force, and hitherto the betterment of woman's position has been brought about by staying these things in her presence.

Whether most of the women in England now desire the suffrage, or whether most of the intelligent ones desire it, cannot be known. Various attempts have been made to ascertain this. On several occasions a referendum has been suggested.⁹³ Partial censuses of women have been taken by rival organizations, but the results are inconclusive since huge majorities are reported to favor the principles of the societies which make the enumerations.⁹⁴ Many people are working for women's suffrage and many are working against it, but the majority of the nation has probably as yet given no voice to its opinion and little approbation to the cause.

⁹² Upon this passage, Miss Olive A. Jelley, of the National Union remarks: "This is of course a matter of opinion, but speaking for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, that Society is growing rapidly in numbers and activities generally. The membership has increased from 30,000 in October, 1911 to 43,000 in May 1913. These numbers represent only annual subscribers and not friends and supporters who do not pay regular annual subscriptions, of whom we count about 20,000. The number of our affiliated societies has risen from 311 in 1911 to 450 in June, 1913, and our funds for the last three years show a similar increase."

⁹³ Cf. 5 P. D., xix, 1747; xxviii, 1517.

⁹⁴ Cf. "A Canvass of Women Municipal Electors in 105 Districts," *Anti-Suffrage Review*, April 1912; Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage*, 51.

Writing the history of the present is difficult chiefly because of the difficulty of interpretation, and particularly in the case of a problem so baffling and complex as the movement for women's suffrage. Right and wrong there must be on both sides, and the final balance cannot be struck until many generations hereafter. He would be rash as the *Ecclesiastusae* who supposed that if enfranchisement is made complete women will obtain all their hopes and desires, or be able to keep all that they fondly assume they can retain. And yet I believe that the historian of the future will record that in the twentieth century Anglo-Saxon people put political power into the hands of the women whom they had made intelligent, and so once more taught nations the art of governing better; and it may be that even the student of now, peering back into the ages and seeing the long procession of women toiling through the mists and despair of the valley of the past, beholds them at last mounting up to the higher ground where with men they will work out the future of the world.